



## News item

# The 4 basic ethical principles that apply to forensic activities are respect for autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice

## Respect for autonomy

Respect for autonomy is a norm that obliges us to respect the decisions (self-determination) of adults who have decision-making capacity. Three conditions must exist for autonomous action by those with capacity to choose:

1. Intentionality
2. Understanding
3. Absence of controlling influences that determine their action.

The following moral rules or obligations are derived from the application of the principle of respect for autonomy:

1. Tell the truth.
2. Respect the privacy of others.
3. Protect confidential information.
4. Obtain consent for interventions with patients.

## Beneficence

The principle of beneficence is a moral obligation to act for the benefit of others. There are 2 aspects of beneficence:

1. Providing benefits
2. Balancing benefits and risks/harms.

The principle of beneficence supports the following moral rules or obligations:

1. Protect and defend the rights of others.
2. Prevent harm from occurring to others.
3. Remove conditions that will cause harm.
4. Help persons with disabilities.
5. Rescue persons in danger.

## Nonmaleficence

The principle of nonmaleficence holds that there is an obligation not to inflict harm on others. It is closely associated with the maxim *primum non nocere* (first do no harm). The principle of nonmaleficence supports the following rules:

1. Do not kill.
2. Do not cause pain or suffering.
3. Do not incapacitate.
4. Do not cause offense.

## Justice

The principle of justice obliges us to equitably distribute benefits, risks, costs, and resources. The following arguments (rules) are supported by the principle of justice:

1. To each person an equal share
2. To each person according to need

3. To each person according to effort
4. To each person according to contribution
5. To each person according to merit.

## Professional code of ethics

In addition to the 4 basic ethical principles, most professional societies or organizations have estab-

lished ethical guidelines for their members with respect to human dignity, confidentiality, privacy, and patient rights.

To obtain a copy of the CFS Guideline of Conduct go to <http://www.forensic-sciences.org/cfs/guideline.htm>.

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